Le Simplegadi ISSN 1824-5226

Vol. XVI-No. 18 November 2018 DOI: 10.17456/SIMPLE-102

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Passages to India: Santha Rama Rau's Adaptation of E. M. Forster's Novel for the Stage

Abstract I: Questo saggio presenta un'analisi critica dell'adattamento teatrale di *A Passage to India* ad opera di Santha Rama Rau, una figura largamente ignorata dalla critica postcoloniale. Attraverso un'analisi dello specifico contesto storico e culturale in cui si situa l'adattamento e un *close reading* del testo in relazione con il romanzo si tratta di far emergere i molteplici "passaggi in India" che lo informano. Il passaggio dal romanzo al teatro è infatti il veicolo intermediale di un passaggio simbolico, all'interno del quale la visione implicitamente eurocentrica del testo di partenza non viene cancellata, ma piuttosto interpretata e ri-creata all'interno di un processo dialogico.

Abstract II: The essay offers a critical analysis of Santha Rama Rau's theatrical adaptation of E. M. Forster's novel, largely ignored by postcolonial criticism. Situating Rau's text within its specific historical and cultural context and examining it through a close reading which has not been attempted before, the essay aims to reveal the multiple "passages to India" that shape it. The intermedial passage from novel to theatre is in fact as well a symbolic passage, where the novel's implicitly Eurocentric vision is by no means erased, but rather interpreted and re-created within a dialogic process.

Published in 1924, *A Passage to India* belongs to that category of colonial texts that "are willing to examine the specific individual and cultural differences between Europeans and natives and to reflect on the efficacy of European values, assumptions, and habits in contrast to those of the indigenous cultures" (JanMohamed 1985: 19). Within the more specific context of the British construction of India, Forster's novel distances itself from the earlier orientalist discourse by positing India-British relations "as an exchange in which British and Indians reciprocally construct one another, each subject position existing within the context of the other, dependent on the recognition of the other" (Lowe 1991: 112). At an emotive level however, the novel is structured by an imaginary identification where the Other functions as an image of the imperialist self, revealing the latter's self-alienation: "conceived in the 'symbolic' realm of intersubjectivity, heterogeneity and particularity", Forster's text is also, at the same time, "seduced by the specularity of 'imaginary' Otherness" (JanMohamed 1985: 19-20). This ambivalent relation of the novel to the stances of colonial narratives made it a privileged locus of the India-British dialogues, of which Rama Rau's adaptation is an integral part.

A Passage to India "was part of my childhood, my education, my view of both India and England", wrote Santha Rama Rau in 1962, on the occasion of the Broadway premiere of her adaptation of Forster's novel. Born into India's elite in 1923, Rama Rau was partly educated in England, travelled widely around the world and, since the 1940s until her death in 2009, lived in the United States, where through her articles, novels and travel books she became a popular expert on India. She recalls sending her script to Forster, "out of the blue and very tentatively" (Burton 2007: 77), and being nervous because she knew he had always refused any film or theatrical adaptation of his novels. Unexpectedly though, he accepted the idea of a stage production of her script and the play was first produced at the Oxford's Playhouse on January 19, 1960. After a local tour it moved to the West End and then on to Broadway.

Rama Rau's play must be situated in the context of the first wave of Indian commentary of Forster's novel emerging during the 1950s and 1960s, after independence and after it became acceptable for a certain number of Indian intellectuals to enter a field dominated by Anglo-American critics. Lisa Lowe has highlighted a general tendency on the part of these first Indian critics to perpetuate the Anglo-American terms of the debate, separating the literary and textual features of the novel from its social and historical issues, steering away "from explicit discussion of the cultural and political imperialism through which the British occupied and managed India for nearly 150 years" (Lowe 1991: 128). Assimilated to this mainly depoliticised context, Rama Rau's figure and work have been largely forgotten in the following wake of postcolonial criticism. The only extensive critical study on her work is Antoinette Burton's *The Postcolonial Careers of Santha Rama Rau* (2007), in which she situates Rama Rau's adaptation of Forster's novel within the American interpretation of the British Raj during the Cold War, mainly in connection with David Lean's film adaptation (1984), which was partly based on Rama Rau's script. Although assessing the highly conflictive relationship between the writer and the movie director and Rama Rau's strong objections to Lean's interpretation of Forster's text, Burton states that "Rama Rau not only helped to make *A Passage to India* a vehicle for interpreting India to the West but was also instrumental in setting the Raj nostalgia machine in motion in Britain and America, at least in its visual and cinematic incarnation" (Burton 2007: 77). Without attempting any textual reading of the play, Burton concludes that Rama Rau's position consists in a "depoliticizing" endorsement of "Forster's utopian liberalism": "(she) shared […] his conviction […] that it was personal relationships between like-minded cosmopolitans (such as himself and Rama Rau) that had the power to transcend the vagaries of colonialism. This was Forster's political vision, and it was – or came to be – Rama Rau's as well" (Burton 2007: 99).

In Forster's novel however, personal relationships ultimately prove to be utterly useless in transcending the colonial power structure and Rama Rau herself, cited by Burton, seems to have fully grasped the tentative nature of Forster's humanism. "Are friendship, cooperation, life, love, the brotherhood of man impossible until the first steps to political freedom are achieved? Are good intentions enough?" (Burton 2007: 99): for Rama Rau this was Forster's basic question, which her play further problematises. Through a close reading of the play, which has not been attempted before, I will thus examine the process of transculturation elaborated by Rama Rau's adaptation, questioning the extent and modalities of her

so called "depoliticizing" approach to Forster's novel. At the same time, I will try to assess the specific intermedial issues created by passing from a long, complex and multilayered narrative into a short theatrical text.

As the novel, the play is set in the imaginary city of Chandrapore against the backdrop of the British Raj and the Indian independence movement in the 1920s. Its three acts mirror the three parts of the novel, condensing the events of parts one and two and including some key elements from the novel's last part. Act one transposes the main nucleus of the novel's first part, the tea party, where the narrative threads that will lead to the central episode narrated in part two – the catastrophe of the Marabar caves – are established. The curtains open on Mr. Fielding's house on the grounds of the Government College at Chandrapore, where he has invited some guests. The first to arrive is Dr. Aziz, a young and cultivated Muslim physician who works at the British hospital in Chandrapore and is meeting Mr. Fielding for the first time. Both Fielding and Aziz are liminal figures in the colonial context and their friendship will offer the main symbolic feature of what Nirad C. Chaudhuri, a prominent Indian critic writing a few years before Rau and radically displacing the depoliticised approach of both Anglo-American and Indian criticism, described as Forster's "humanitarian consciousness": a "determination to understand power as an individual rather than a structural affair" (Chaudhuri 1954: 328). Although refusing the Eurocentric colonial assumptions, Fielding has indeed no political opinions on the legitimacy of British rule in India and his distaste for the colonial discourse is rather founded on a humanist vision: "The world, he believed, is a globe of men who are trying to reach one another and can best do so by the help of goodwill plus culture and intelligence" (Forster 2005: 57). Aziz on the other hand, although resenting the racism and prejudices of the English rulers, admires the coloniser's culture and is happy and flattered by Fielding's invitation. Despite goodwill, culture and intelligence, the colonial power structure that Fielding and Aziz's personal relationship should be able to overcome implicitly shapes indeed the novel's discourse. As pointed out by Lowe, throughout the novel "there are many moments when the narrative perspective shifts to include the points of view of both the English and the Indian characters", challenging "the customary relation of British narrator and Indian object of description"; however, "the narrative perspective at times returns to a position outside the drama, a position culturally coded as British and distinctly non-Indian" (Lowe 1991: 114). This is particularly the case of Aziz's descriptions, where the narrator generalises his emotionality as a racial and ethnic trait. Moreover, despite the fluctuations in narrative perspective, the orientalist posture inherited from a previous tradition also permeates Aziz's own voice, expressing a clumsy eagerness to please his new English friend. Chaudhuri dismissed this representation of Aziz as servile, simple and hot-headed (Chaudhuri 1954: 119) and these traits, combined with Fielding's tranquil unawareness of his own symbolic position of power, are directly challenged by Rama Rau's adaptation.

Although replicating the novel's dialogue, the opening of act one integrates within Aziz's original buffoonery an ironic take on the colonial cleavage. "The fact is", says Aziz, "I have been wanting to meet you for a long time. But where is one to meet in a wretched hole like Chandrapore. (*With a touch of irony*) Where will the poor Indian doctor run across the

Exalted European Principal of the Government College?" (Rama Rau 1960: I, 11). Later on, when Fielding asks Aziz if he has a spare collar stud, the novel has him answer: "'Yes, yes, one minute'. 'Not if you're wearing it yourself'. 'No, no, one in my pocket'. Stepping aside, so that his outline might vanish, he wrenched off his collar, and pulled out of his shirt the back stud […]. 'Here it is', he cried" (Forster 2005: 59). In the play, the same situation instead gives rise to a conflict:

> FIELDING (*after a pause*) But nobody carries a spare collar stud in his pocket.
> AZIZ I, always! In case of emergency.
> FIELDING Nonsense.
> AZIZ *stares at the stud in his hand, dismayed. He puts it in his pocket, touchily.*
> AZIZ Indians are famous for talking nonsense, doubtless you know that.
> FIELDING All I meant is that I don't want to deprive you…
> AZIZ (*sarcastically*) No depriving, rest assured. It should be the highest of honors for me.
> FIELDING (*matching his sarcasm, clearly irritated*) Look, Dr. Aziz, keep your stud. I can easily send for a new one.
> AZIZ By all means! Yes, yes, by all means! Send your servant to the bazaar – get your new collar stud – an unsoiled collar stud – that is what Indians are for, isn't it?
> FIELDING What are you talking about?
> AZIZ (*even more excited*) Only an Englishman is friend enough to do a favor. I am wrong to offer. I see that.
> FIELDING (*after a long pause*) Dr. Aziz, please forgive me. […] I am delighted and grateful to wear your collar stud (I, 12-13).

Aziz's former irony has turned into sarcasm, and the conflict inherent in the colonial power structure is here immediately brought back within the individual relationship, freeing Aziz from his own orientalist caricature and forcing Fielding to an awareness that he never possesses in the novel.

In the novel, Aziz's ability to handle the coloniser's language is meant to counterbalance his almost caricatural compliance. Surprised at finding Fielding's room so untidy, Aziz exclaims: "Everything ranged coldly on shelves was what I thought"; "I hae ma doots," replies Fielding in a heavy Scottish accent; "What's the last sentence, please?", asks Aziz, "Will you teach me some new words and so improve my English?" (Forster 2005: 59-60). Aziz's naive eagerness to improve his English, however, implicitly transforms the novel's discourse into a patronising reinstatement of colonial power. Within the explicitly conflictual situation which was rephrased in the play, the gap between Aziz's English and metropolitan English is instead underscored, signalling the text's awareness of the function of language as a medium of the colonial power. "*Anything is wrong?*" (I, 12) asks Aziz when Fielding stumps on his collar-stud, while in the novel the same line runs as "*Anything wrong*?": Zia Mohyeddin, the actor who played Aziz in the Broadway production, said that this was indeed one of his favourite lines in the play, "because it tells so much about the type of pre-Independence Muslim that Dr. Aziz is" (Burton 2007: 85).

Intertwined with the narrative thread of Aziz and Fielding's relationship, the novel

develops additional layers of meaning which problematise its symbolic value. Adela Quested, an English girl on her "passage to India" and informally engaged to Ronny Heaslop, the District Magistrate of Chandrapore, is the catastrophe's main agent, accusing Aziz of having sexually assaulted her in the Marabar caves. Like Fielding, she doesn't fit the colonial categories but her way of escaping them is immediately and ironically denounced in both the novel and the play as naive: "She's a Kensington intellectual", says Fielding to Aziz, "(*very gently mocking*) She tells me she wants to know the *real* India. […] She was saying the other night at the Club that she was tired of seeing picturesque Indians pass before her as a frieze, that now she wanted to meet some of them" (I, 17).

As in the novel, act one underscores Adela's unattractiveness from Aziz's point of view. In the play, however, Aziz is transformed into an ambivalent object of Adela's desire, openly sexualising their relationship and thus offering a clearer background to Adela's following delusion in the caves.

> AZIZ A hammam is a bath… but oh, Miss Quested, it is a beautiful luxurious bath. Imagine yourself a princess, Miss Quested, your black hair flowing down to your waist, polished and shining like the wing of a bird, face is round like the moon, breasts like pomegranates. You are surrounded by your handmaidens who rub your skin with sandalwood oil, and perfume the water of the hammam with musk, and then scatter over it rose petals for beauty. Somewhere in the garden a bul-bul is singing. Oh, there is no sweeter sound than the bul-bul. You step out of your veils and into the water, and –
>
> FIELDING *clears his throat noisily, half-smiling at the weird contrast between the straight-backed, unvoluptuous figure of* MISS QUESTED *and* AZIZ*'s description.* […]
> AZIZ (*he takes the pot over to her and as he pours says*) Pretend that this is sherbet you are drinking… the drink of those beautiful, voluptuous princesses…
> MISS QUESTED, *uncomfortable and alarmed by AZIZ's extravagance, looks up at him as he speaks, bending over her. Her hand trembles and the tea spills over her dress and the sofa. She jumps up, the cup shatters* (I, 24-25).

After conjuring up these sensual images in Adela's imagination, the play proceeds to elaborate through Aziz's speech a conventionally orientalist juxtaposition of East and West, which is then confronted with a different set of categories, shaping Ronny's colonial discourse: "The thing I've learned out here", says Ronny to Adela, " – and you will too – is that we are better for them than they are for each other. Peace, security, good administration, justice…we've brought them all those" (I, 36). Within this clash of defining categories, Adela's attempt to find a syncretic solution in "understanding" and being "useful" is bound to fail: "…please try not to be so emotional about it all" (I, 37) exclaims Ronny, assigning her to the same imaginary realm that in Aziz's discourse defined the Eastern culture. In the utter collapse of all defining categories, Adela loses her hold on her own identity and openly expresses her doubts about their marriage – "*Emotional*? [...] Ronny, we must have a thorough talk. […] I think we should… well, consider a bit more before we get married" (I, 37). Their following reconciliation significantly marks Adela's need to recover her true self, escaping a "muddleheadedness" that is "really not like me" (I, 37).

The imaginary East-West polarisation emphasised by the play is, however, not as simple as it may seem: Adela's conflicting attitude is indeed marked by a claim to self-determination and emancipation from the traditional patriarchal categories, transversally running through her relationships with both Aziz and Ronny and intersecting the defining categories of East and West. "Why be useful, Miss Quested? Just love India", says Aziz. Adela's uneasy reaction to Aziz's involuntary seduction is followed by an attempt to affirm her will as an active part of the society that she is meant to integrate: "In England I'm used to lead an active life…so different from the kind of life the English wives lead out here". "Miss Quested", Aziz insists, "I tell you what. Think with your heart for this time, not with your head" (I, 31). In Adela's answer, Aziz's polarisation between East and West turns into a conflict between an old patriarchal order and the new aspirations of Western liberal women: "What's the point of having a brain if one doesn't use it? I intend to use mine to understand what I can do about India and then to put that knowledge to some good. […] Dr. Aziz, I'm sorry. I don't mean to criticise – but I can't agree with the Oriental idea of women […] that we mustn't use our minds. That we should be just wives and mothers" (I, 31). Adela's claim to self-determination is clearly stated at the end of the tea party, when she remains alone with the two Indian guests. The play has her lighting a cigarette, "to the scarcely concealed astonishment of the Indians" and offering an additional cause to Ronny's shocked reaction: "I don't like to see an English girl left smoking cigarettes with two Indians", he says. "This particular English girl stayed here, as she smokes, by her own wish", she answers (I, 34).

Rau's feminist discourse manifestly doesn't challenge the main issues of colonialism's intersection with patriarchy, that will be brought to light two decades later by postcolonial feminism. On the contrary, in order to represent the white woman's position within the structure of patriarchal power the play uses Aziz's "Oriental idea of women", further accentuating Forster's orientalist perspective. Adela is thus assigned to an inherently ambivalent position, as belonging both to the dominant colonialist society and to the "subaltern" group of western women who struggle to make their voice heard: "I can see that men might not wish to relinquish their privileges", says Adela commenting on Aziz's idea that women mustn't use their minds and "should be just wives and mothers"; "The English have many privileges in India", replies Aziz (I, 32). In this respect, it seems particularly significant how the category of emotions is used both by Aziz and Ronny, underscoring the distance that separates Eastern culture from Adela's Western identity in the first case, and dismissing her point of view as a female lack of rational judgement in the second. In both cases, the aim of the masculine discourse is to silence her.

Much has been said about "the enigmatic presence of absence in the caves at the centre of the novel" (Barratt 1993: 127). In chapter sixteen, the central chapter of the central section of the novel, we see Aziz and Adela starting off together, away from the rest of the expedition party. The narrator follows Aziz, going into a cave by himself in order to recover his balance after Adela's insensitive questioning about his dead wife: we see him lightning a cigarette and then going out and vainly searching for Adela. The guide informs him that she has disappeared into another cave and he finally spots her at the bottom of the hill. What happened to Adela in the cave remains a disquieting blank space at the very core of the nov-

el, but the reader knows for sure that Aziz hasn't followed her and therefore has not assaulted her as she will pretend later on. In fact, the blank space of the presumed sexual assault is not meant to make the reader doubt of Aziz's innocence, but is rather the culminating point of a larger narrative construction, where the caves are depicted from the onset in terms of an essence that will not reveal itself in language, lying beyond the utterance of characters and similarly reduced to negative comparison in the narrator's voice (Barratt 1993: 128-129). It is this modernist struggle with language that provokes in the reader a powerful "impression of muddle", a growing "sense of inexplicable mystery" (Hoepper Moran 1988: 596). Forster's modernist narrative however, cannot be easily translated into actions and gestures on the stage, and in order to transpose its effects on the spectator Rau's adaptation must resort to other means. Within the form of Forster's novel, the blank space of the caves' episode is a manifest break from the rules of traditional narrative, all the more remarkable in an author with so omniscient and controlling a narrative voice. Within the theatrical codes instead, hiding violent events from the spectator's view is a well-established practice, dating back to the classical canons of tragic theatre. Thus, in order to convey the novel's sense of unsettling mystery, Rau builds her scene around an empty stage, emphasising the expressive power of the novel's blank space.

Before the mystery of Adela's presumed assault, the novel had shown Adela, Aziz and Mrs. Moore, Ronny's elderly mother, entering a first cave. Crammed in the crowd, Mrs. Moore loses sight of her companions in the dark: "(she) couldn't breathe, and some vile naked thing struck her face and settled on her mouth like a pad. She tried to regain the entrance tunnel, but an influx of villagers swept her back. She hit her head. For an instant she went mad, hitting and gasping like a fanatic. For not only did the crush and stench alarm her; there was also a terrifying echo" (Forster 2005: 137). In the play, Mrs. Moore's experience in the cave is transformed into a first blank space: "(Aziz) *chivvies the whole group into the caves and follows them in. The stage is empty for a moment, and faintly a booming echo is heard, nothing comprehensible, but faintly ominous. It is repeated and swells and becomes confused"* (II 1, 51). Then, the spectator sees Mrs. Moore coming out of the cave, shaken and ill, and going to her chair. The same mechanism is repeated just after Aziz and Adela start off together. We don't see them separating, we don't see Aziz going into a cave by himself, and we obviously don't see what happens to Adela. Instead, the spectator is left with Mrs. Moore, who remains on the stage leaning back in her deck-chair and closing her eyes: "*The lights dim for a few seconds to indicate the passage of time, and the booming echo is heard again. […] When the lights go up again, MRS. MOORE is in the same position […]. She stirs and sits up abruptly".* "What happened? What was that? Did something happen?" asks Mrs. Moore, "[…] A dream […] yes, a dream" (II 1, 54). Apparently knowing more than the spectator, Mrs. Moore's speech further emphasises the mystery of the episode, punctuating like a sort of oracle the fragmented reconstruction of the facts attempted by Fielding: "So nothing happened […]"; "Of course something happened, Mr. Fielding" (II 1, 60). The spectator however, has no clue of what happened, and here the lingering and unsettling feeling of mystery also includes Aziz's role in the accident, postponing the proof of his innocence until Adela's testimony in act three.

Both in the novel and in the play Mrs. Moore is a key character. The title of the novel's first part – "Mosque" – refers in fact to her first encounter with Aziz, a crucial episode preceding the tea party, which the play evokes in act one:

> AZIZ Mrs. Moore, do you remember our mosque?
> MOORE Of course
> AZIZ Do you remember how we saw the moon caught in the tank of water? Trembling and bigger than the real moon? Do you remember?
> MOORE I will never forget it (I, 24).

In the mosque Mrs. Moore and Aziz had been bound by a deep sense of spiritual belonging, removing every cultural and political barrier: "That makes no difference", says Mrs. Moore in the novel, "God is here" (Forster 2005: 17). Afterwards, the novel will evoke again this spiritual epiphany through Mrs. Moore's compelling vision of the moon suddenly appearing on the Ganges' waters (2005: 28); an image translated in the play as the moon caught in a tank of water as recalled by Aziz.

If at the beginning of the novel Mrs. Moore's spiritual bond to Aziz heralds the syncretism of Fielding and Aziz's friendship, the catastrophe brought on by the caves' episode destroys it. In both Adela's and Mrs. Moore's experiences, India becomes indeed an imaginary projection of their troubled selves, conveyed through the recurring image of a "muddle" which the play evokes from act one. Adela calls her own inner confusion a "muddleness", from which she tries to escape by reconciling herself with Ronny and deceptively recovering her "real" self. As for Mrs. Moore, at the caves she will indeed experience the transformation of the spiritual mystery perceived in the mosque into a hopeless chaos: "India knows the troubles of the whole world […] but offers no solutions", she says, "It jumbles everything together, the ridiculous and the august […] like life" (II 1, 46). In scene two of the second act, set in the late afternoon of the same day at the English Club, the play has Mrs. Moore telling of her own experience of the caves, resuming different passages from the novel. The play symbolically places her in "a chair separated from the rest" of the Anglo-Indian community, where she remains until the end of the act, "a disapproving, compelling figure": "She says very little, but nobody can ignore her or her occasional movements of irritations or weariness" (II 2, 67).

> MRS. MOORE (*in a monotone*) "Boum" – or something like that. Whatever is said, the same monotonous noise replies. "Boum" is the sound as far as I can express it, or "bou-oum", or "ou-boum"… utterly dull. Hope, politeness, the blowing of a nose, the squeak of a boot, all produce "Boum". […] It was both frightening and disagreeable. […] It undermined one's hold on life. It said, "Pathos, piety, courage… they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value". If one had spoken vileness in that place or quoted poetry, the comment would have been the same – "ou-boum". If one had spoken with the tongues of angels and pleaded for all the unhappiness and misunderstanding in the world, past, present, to come, for all the misery men must undergo whatever their opinion and position, and however

> much they dodge or bluff […] it would amount to the same. That echo is India, after all. The end of all our pathetic dreams […]. Boum […]. Nothing […] good or bad […] love and hate and terror… all one. […] everything I have ever believed in turns out to be meaningless […]. I wish only to be left in peace to live out my days knowing what I now know (II 2, 68, 74).

This "frightening" and "faintly ominous" echo, that the spectator has heard resounding through an empty stage in the previous scene, joins with the symbolic image of the muddle, bringing it to its tragic conclusion. Mrs. Moore's vision, writes F. C. Crews, is indeed "an antivision, a realization that to see through the world of superficial appearances is to be left with nothing at all" (Crews 2015: 157).

In the novel though, the despairing void of Mrs. Moore's "antivision" is somehow redeemed by a proper vision, opening the third part of the narrative: "Some hundreds of miles westward of the Marabar hills, and two years later in time, Professor Narayan Godbole stands in the presence of God" (Forster 2005: 269). Professor Godbole, Fielding's Hindu assistant, is here among a crowd assembled in a holy ceremony and he starts singing with his students' choir, the music evoking "inner images" while the singers' expressions become "fatuous and languid":

> They loved all men, the whole universe, and scraps of their past, tiny splinters of detail, emerged for a moment into the universal warmth. Thus Godbole, though she was not important to him, remembered an old woman he had met in Chandrapore days. Chance brought her into his mind while it was in this heated state, he did not select her, she happened to occur among the throng of soliciting images, a tiny splinter, and he impelled her by his spiritual force to that place where completeness can be found. Completeness, not reconstruction […]. Professor Godbole had once more developed the life of his spirit. He had, with increasing vividness, again seen Mrs. Moore, and round her faintly clinging forms of trouble. He was a Brahaman, she Christian, but it made no difference, it made no difference whether she was a trick of his memory or a telepathic appeal. It was his duty, as it was his desire, to place himself in the position of God and to love her, and to place himself in her position and to say to God, 'Come, come, come' (Forster 2005: 271-272; 275-276).

"God is here", Mrs. Moore had said in the mosque and now, in a Hindu temple, professor Godbole "stands in the presence of God", invoking on her behalf a vision where the caves' meaningless chaos is transformed into a redeeming spiritual communion with the whole universe. The three parts of the novel – "Mosque", "Caves" and "Temple" – are indeed the symbolic steps of a spiritual quest which, although rooted in Hindu mysticism, concerns every human being. Rama Rau's adaptation cuts out the third part of Forster's text, but doesn't surrender the spiritual redemption offered by the novel to the tragic human predicament. To this end, the play amplifies Professor Godbole's role in act one. At the tea party, he is asked by the other guests to describe the Marabar Caves. As in the novel, he foregoes the pleasure of such a description, but here he offers instead the suggestion of a spiritual path capable of transforming the "muddle" into a vision of universal "completeness":

> AZIZ Then they *are* deservedly famous? Yes?
> GODBOLE Oh yes, famous with reason. And terrible…with reason.
> QUESTED Terrible? But how can a cave be terrible? Especially when there is nothing there.
> GODBOLE Miss Quested, pardon me, there is everything there. For in nothing there is all. […] Ah, if it were a question of emptiness, then, indeed, the caves would be empty and nobody would go there. Why would they become famous, in such a case? In our religion, in Hinduism, you see, everything has two or many faces. In the terror there is also calm and comfort. The Creator is also the destroyer (I, 28).

"Well, there must be *something* to see", says Adela impatiently. "There is enlightenment or obscurity. Nothing to see except with the inner eye", replies Godbole (I, 29). Adela doesn't understand because, as Mrs. Moore says, "She only believes the evidence of her eyes" (I, 29). In act two, commenting on Adela's incapacity to come to terms with her inner vision, Mrs. Moore significantly evokes Godbole's warning: "The Professor told us…warned us… that there was nothing to see at the caves except with the inner eye. […] Is she so special that she cannot come to terms? […] With India. With herself" (II 2, 82). Incapable of sustaining what her inner eye had shown her in the caves, Adela looks away and imagines instead a contingent, intelligible event: Aziz's sexual assault. Mrs Moore, on the contrary, doesn't turn away from what she has seen, but Godbole's vision of completeness is beyond her reach and all she sees is meaningless chaos – "Boum […]. Nothing […] good or bad […] love and hate and terror […] all one […]" (II 2, 84).

Love is the key notion around which the play weaves together the "muddle" of self-alienation and the redeeming "completeness" evoked by Professor Godbole in the third part of the novel. "Love in the heat. Marriage in the hills", Mrs. Moore exclaims after the catastrophe, "Such a fuss! Marriage, marriage. The human race would have become a single person centuries ago if marriage were any use. But it is only an excuse because you are all too frightened to love. Of *love*. So you get married and talk a lot of rubbish about love… love in a church, love in a cave, as if there is the slightest difference" (II 2, 83). Backlit through that contemptuous description of worldly love appears a deeper notion of love, absolutely alien to the daily rituals and worries of life. This theme also shapes the play's elaboration of the key scene of Adela's testimony at the trial, in act three. "You went alone into one of those caves?" asks Mr. McBryde in the novel; "That is quite correct", answers Adela.

> "And the prisoner followed you". […] "May I have half a minute before I reply to that, Mr. McBryde?" […] Her vision was of several caves. She saw herself in one, and she was also outside it, watching its entrance, for Aziz to pass in. She failed to locate him. It was the doubt that had often visited her, but solid and attractive, like the hills. "I am not" – speech was more difficult than vision. "I am not quite sure" (Forster 2005: 215).

In the play, the novel's elliptic jump from vision to speech is elaborated through a broken recollection: "I discovered… I discovered… inside me… The discovery was such a

shock... I felt like a mountaineer whose rope had broken. (*Appealingly*) Not to love the man one's going to marry! Love… Yes I was thinking… about India… about love… (*in a suddenly shocked voice*) Oh… I remember… I remember now…" (III, 103). Adela's concern about her own personal feelings is thus explicitly denounced as the catastrophe's cause: "she has started the machine; it must run to its end", affirmed Mrs. Moore at the Marabar caves. To this line paraphrased from the novel the play significantly adds: "The machine to kill love" (II 1, 60), underscoring again the existence of a spiritual love – that kind of communion experienced by Mrs. Moore and Aziz in the mosque – which has been "killed" by Adela's selfish, worldly notion of love.

In act three, the play immediately states the irremediable fracture brought on by the caves' episode through a stage marked by the official symbols of the colonial power. The curtains open onto a tropical court-room; hanging on the wall above the magistrate's chair is a Union Jack and below it a large tinted photograph of King George V and Queen Mary in their durbar robes. Despite Fielding's unyielding support of Aziz before and throughout the trial, Adela's admission of her mistake and Aziz's release "without one stain on his character" (III, 104), good will and affection are not enough anymore.

As in the novel, Aziz and Fielding's falling out in the trial's aftermath is caused by their difference of opinion regarding the compensation which Adela is sentenced to pay. "Now is the time for congratulations and celebration", says Fielding in the play, "You are the one in a strong position. […] You have won a great victory" (III, 108-109). The compensation should symbolically mark Aziz's "strong position", but Fielding only sees the individual, human side of the question: "Miss Quested is an honest girl, in spite of the trouble she has caused. Do let her off lightly. She must pay your costs, that's only fair, but don't treat her like a conquered enemy" (III, 109). Aziz however, now clearly sees his position within the collective structure of the unyielding colonial power: "let Miss Quested off paying", he says

> so that the English may say, Here is a native who has actually behaved like a gentleman; if it was not for his black face we would almost allow him to join our club. (*suddenly changing his tone to bitterness*) The approval of your compatriots no longer interests me, I have become anti-British, and ought to have done so sooner. It would have saved me numerous troubles (III, 109).

As in the novel, it is the reminding of his bond to Mrs. Moore that finally makes Aziz yield to Fielding's request: "Do it for my sake, then. Or if not mine, then Mrs. Moore's". The effect of Aziz's recollection of Mrs. Moore on his concession leads to the obvious question: "And me? Are we no longer friends?" asks Fielding. "You belong with Miss Quested," answers Aziz, "You cannot be with us at the same time. […] We do not understand each other. We are on different sides, and until there is no question of sides, we cannot be friends" (III, 111).

"Completeness, not reconstruction", says Professor Godbole in the novel. In the play's final act, Rama Rau clearly chose to underscore the impossible reconstruction over spiritual completeness. "We shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea", says Aziz mockingly on the final page of the novel, while horse riding with Fielding in the mountains,

> […] and then' – he rode against him furiously – "and then", he concluded, half kissing him, "you and I shall be friends". "Why can't we be friends now?" said the other, holding him affectionately, "It's what I want. It's what you want". But the horses didn't want it – they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it, sending up rocks through which the riders must pass single-file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest-House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath: they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, "No, not yet", and the sky said, "No, not there" (Forster 2005: 306).

"Forster's India", Said wrote, "is so affectionately personal and so remorselessly metaphysical that his view of Indians as a nation contending for sovereignty with Britain is not politically very serious, or even respectful" (Said 1993: 246). When the failure of personal relationships is finally acknowledged, the conflict inherent in the colonial power structure is indeed projected by the novel into a superior cosmic dimension, which ultimately absorbs and annihilates it.

In the play instead, the answer to Fielding's question – "Are we no longer friends? […]. Why not Aziz… why…" – doesn't come from an indifferent nature, but from Aziz and Fielding themselves, both recognising the structural conflict that separates them:

> AZIZ We are on different sides and until there is no question of sides, we cannot be friends.
> FIELDING Why should we be ruled by such things… colour, or politics… It is India that forces this on us.
> AZIZ You see, in the end even you say that. It is India […]. Yes, probably India will be blamed for all the guilts, and perhaps it is to blame. India is a large country, it can absorb all those guilts and a great deal as well. It can certainly absorb our friendship and make nothing of it.
> FIELDING One day, when things are different…
> AZIZ One day (III, 111-112).

The imaginary nature of India as a metaphor for the inner self is ironically revealed in Aziz's final speech. Embracing everything, India absorbs indeed all the projections of the imperialist self as well as the individual and collective guilt of colonialism: finally unmasked, the metaphor is thus deprived of its function of transcending and dissolving the political conflict. "You belong with Miss Quested", said Aziz to Fielding, "You cannot be with us at the same time". Now, Aziz exits the stage through one door and Fielding exits the other way, through the very door previously taken by Adela, visually reinstating the impossible reconstruction. It is a tragic and very earthly ending, in which the only reference to Forster's indifferent nature is the "very young and extraordinary beautiful" Indian man operating the *punkah*, whom the spectator has seen since the beginning of the act, sitting among the symbols of colonial power, and who continues "to twitch his foot, staring without expression over the empty court room" (III, 87, 112).

In 1975 Vasant A. Shahane edited a volume of essays by Indian critics on Forster's novel, explaining in his introduction that the primary justification for the collection was "to

project an Indian critic's image of Forster's *A Passage to India* after about fifty years of its impact on the country and the English-speaking world. What is basically important in this approach is the Indianness of the native point of view, its process of evaluation and its validity" (Shahane 1975: xiii). I believe that Rau's reading of Forster's novel must be culturally inscribed within this critical notion of 'Indianness', a signifier used by colonial narratives as a means of excluding and subordinating the Indian subject and transformed by Shahane into an oppositional category, defining the heterogeneity and specificity of Indian responses, aimed to "the establishment of writing positions that alter and revise the relationship between the binary poles of British writing subject and Indian object" (Lowe 1991: 123). Ironically distancing itself from the novel's implicit Eurocentric assumptions and working through its folds in order to transform and further elaborate its issues, Rau's text is indeed a response to the ruling British perspective. As an adaptation however, Rau's play is not only a critical response implied by and directed to Forster's novel, but also the locus of a dialogic process where Forster's complex and multilayered vision of colonial India is appropriated, interpreted and re-created through the perception, sensibility and talent of a cosmopolitan Indian woman in an early postcolonial context: a 'palimpsest' where both visions are inscribed in an ongoing dialogue.

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